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FBI Probed Self On Destruction Of Oswald Data

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The FBI and the Justice Department two years ago conducted an internal investigation to determine whether any FBI official should be prosecuted for destroying documents relating to the probe of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, newly released bureau files disclosed today.

The documents in question proved that FBI's the Dallas field office was checking on Lee Harvey Oswald before the assassination.

In more than 59,000 pages of the documents relased today, it became apparent that there was a major discrepancy between the statements of the special agent in-charge at Dallas and the agent who handled the Oswald case.

THE QUESTION of whether the FBI was trying to eliminate any trace of Oswald in its files in the first hours after Kennedy's death is not a new one, but the documents released today disclose the depth of the investigation conducted by FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley after reporters and tghe House of Representatives began pressing for explanations.

What the documents do not reveal is what conclusion the FBI and the Criminal Division of the Justice Department reached about who ordered destruction of a note Oswald left for Hosty at the Dallas field office several days before Kennedy was killed Nov. 22, 1963.

There is no dispute that Oswald left a note, somewhat threatening in nature, for James P. Hosty Jr., an FBI agent in Dallas. Nor is there a dkispute that the note itself was destroyed a few hours after Kennedy was killed.

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What remains at issue is whether J. Gordon Shanklin, the special agent in Cahrge in Dallas, ordered Hosty to destroy this evidence and, if he did, whether he acted on orders from some FBI higher-up in Washington.

THE HOSTY-OSWALD matter is one of the more fascinating elements of the Dallas incident because of speculation about how history may have been changed if Hosty had had better luck trying to find Oswald in the days before the shooting.

The FBI documents released today reaffirm that Hosty, who was then 35, knew from Nov. 4, 1963 — almost three weeks before the assassination — that Oswald was a defector and a Communist sympathazer and that he worked at the Texas Schoolbook Depository.

Even though Hosty knew the Kennedy motorcade route would take the president past Oswald's job, the agent didn't make the connection because no one had officially informed him of the route. When Hosty heard about the president's death, he told a Dallas policeman he was working on Oswald, the suspect, and this led Dalls Police Chief Jesse Curry to tell nationwide television audience that the FBI had prior knowledge of Oswald as a threat to the president's safety.

This drove FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and his top aides to demand that Curry retract publicly his statements that the FBI knew about Oswald beforehand. Curry did retract them, because he had the information second-hand.

THE FILES SHOW that Oswald went to the Dallas field office about 10 days before the assasination and asked to see Hosty. When a clerk, Nannie Lee Fenner, told Oswald Hosty was out, the ex-Marine left an unsealed envelope with a note inside.

Fenner told investigators in 1975 that she read the note and it said approximately, "Let this be a warning. I will blow up the FBI and the Dallas Police Department if you don't stop bothering my wife. Signed. Lee Harvey Oswald."

From here on the stories of various FBI officials in Dallas differ.